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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000126

SIPDIS

STATE FOR PM, IO/PSC AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2020  
TAGS: [OVIP](#) [MARR](#) [KPKO](#) [HA](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS FOCUSES ON  
EXERCISES AND PEACEKEEPING DURING MOROCCO VISIT

REF: RABAT 0125 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Samuel L. Kaplan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: General Conway, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, visited Rabat, February 3-5. During his meeting with General Bennani, the two Generals discussed exercises, exchanges and support. General Conway expressed his desire to strengthen AFRICAN LION. He said that U.S. Marines were on tough ground in Afghanistan, and he appealed to General Bennani to consider sending Moroccan troops to Afghanistan and back to Haiti as part of the UN peacekeeping mission there (MINUSTAH). General Bennani said that he has used the U.S. Marines as a model for the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces. As for MINUSTAH, Embassy subsequently learned that Morocco will not send peacekeepers there because Haiti recognizes the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), General James T. Conway, visited Rabat February 3 ) 5, 2010 to meet the Ambassador and members of the country team, as well as the Inspector General of the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces, General de Corps d'Armee Abdelaziz Bennani. The Commandant was accompanied by the USMC Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Lieutenant General Richard C. Zilmer, the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations, Lieutenant General Thomas D. Waldhauser, and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Carlton W. Kent. General Conway reinforced the strong relationship between the U.S. and Moroccan militaries, and discussed the possible enlargement of Exercise AFRICAN LION, the improvement of infrastructure for exercises, USMC interest in a renewed Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the opportunity for Morocco to contribute force to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), and the prospect for Morocco to contribute training forces to the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

¶3. (SBU) General Conway characterized his visit to Rabat as supporting DoS and DoD objectives. He expressed satisfaction that his travel provided an opportunity for a stop in Morocco. He acknowledged that Marines were on tough ground in Afghanistan, as they had been in Iraq, but that they were where Marines were needed and best-suited in order to achieve the environment required for indigenous security forces to be able to sustain a lasting peace. He appreciated that Morocco is a strong partner in countering extremism in the trans-Sahara region, that Morocco provides an excellent training opportunity for reserve Marine forces in Exercise AFRICAN LION, and offered to consider the possibility of Marine Expeditionary Unit augmentation of this year's AFRICAN LION if training and transit schedules permitted.

¶4. (C/NF) General Conway thanked General Bennani for the opportunity to meet, and recounted his appreciation for the

long ties between the two countries. He stated he sought to strengthen those ties through exercises, exchanges, and support. He expressed his desire to increase the sophistication of AFRICAN LION, in conjunction with U.S. Africa Command, possibly this year. He noted the need for infrastructure improvement in the exercise area in order to support increased participation and expressed his strong desire for an updated SOFA in order to provide Marines enduring protection as they increased numbers during the exercise. He asked General Bennani if Morocco would consider force contribution to MINUSTAH in the wake of the earthquake, alongside the U.S., and asked him to consider the addition of Morocco to the large circle of countries providing support to the NATO mission in Afghanistan as trainers of Afghan security forces.

¶5. (C/NF) General Bennani welcomed General Conway,s visit both professionally and personally, expressing his esteem for USMC training, esprit, and capability. He related how he had sought to model his forces after the USMC and how he had sought their participation in exercises in Morocco. He emphasized that cooperation was strong between the Royal Armed Forces and all U.S. military forces but especially strong with the USMC. He thanked the Ambassador for the assistance given to get Moroccan medical relief to Haiti. He stated that he would communicate to the King the request for Moroccan contribution to MINUSTAH, and the possibility for Moroccan support to NATO in Afghanistan in a training role, and that a response would be provided at the appropriate level with the assumption that this same request would be extended through formal diplomatic channels.

¶6. (C/NF) General Bennani appeared subdued throughout the discussion and ensuing luncheon. He was scrupulously courteous but not particularly talkative, permitting subordinates to carry the conversation over lunch. He was philosophical in response to a question from General Conway on the role of moderates in overcoming extremism, positing that it is the role of governments to study and apply only those means that will work; that force is necessary as a threat but that only economic and social development will push back extremists. He did not appear eager to become involved in Afghanistan, offering that ethnicities, terrain, religions, and history would make any task very difficult. It was notable that he took a phone call reportedly directly from the King during the meeting.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: In sum, General Conway,s visit reinforced the already strong relationship between the U.S. and Moroccan militaries, supported well-known U.S. interest in exercise infrastructure improvement and SOFA, opened a window to potential robusting of AFRICAN LION, and served to request Moroccan consideration of force contribution to MINUSTAH and NATO in Afghanistan.

¶8. (C) Comment Continued: Embassy subsequently learned that Morocco will not send peacekeepers to Haiti because that nation recognizes the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. In fact, it was the act of recognition that led Morocco to withdraw its previous peacekeepers from Haiti. End Comment.

¶9. (U) General Conway did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Morocco>  
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